

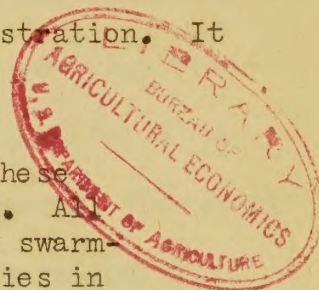
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HOUSING FOR MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

The Farm Security Administration, successor to the Resettlement Administration, began its program of housing for migrant farm labor families in 1935. The program was started with great hesitation, and only the pressure of extraordinary emergency conditions provided the stimulus for carrying on the program. While a few large farms in various parts of the country provided acceptable housing for some of the migrant families whom they seasonally employed, most of the migrant families sought shelter in unorganized camps, or "jungles", along road sides, river or ditch banks. A frequently quoted description of the type of shelter with which migrant families were able to provide themselves appeared in a 1936 report of the California State Relief Administration. It read in part as follows:

"Old tents, gunny sacks, dry-goods boxes and scrap tin. These are the material from which the dwellings are constructed. All the shacks visited were without floors ... very dirty and swarming with clouds of flies. There were no sanitary facilities in evidence and the backyard has been used as a toilet. An irrigation ditch half-filled with muddy water has been used for all purposes."



A more complete description of the available housing is given for a cotton camp in Arizona:

"....there were 18 tents arranged in a square with a vacant space in the center. This space was used for parking cars, and apparently for piling up refuse, as it was littered with old boxes and rubbish at the time of the visit. The tents were located only a few feet off the highway and an irrigation ditch ran along one side of the camp. There were no screens for the tents. A small two-lid stove was furnished for each tent. The rest of the furnishings had to be supplied by the workers. Only a few of the workers had beds. Most of them slept on blankets on the ground or made pallets from long grass hay gathered nearby. In practically none of the tents visited were there chairs, wooden boxes

THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

The first chapter of the book is devoted to the early history of the United States, from the time of the first European settlement to the end of the eighteenth century. It deals with the discovery of the continent, the early exploration, the establishment of the first colonies, and the struggle for independence. The second chapter is devoted to the history of the United States from the end of the eighteenth century to the present. It deals with the growth of the country, the development of the economy, the expansion of the territory, and the evolution of the government. The third chapter is devoted to the history of the United States from the present to the future. It deals with the current problems of the country, the prospects for the future, and the role of the United States in the world.

The book is written in a clear and concise style, and is suitable for use as a textbook in schools and colleges. It contains many interesting facts and figures, and is well illustrated with maps and pictures. The book is a valuable source of information for anyone interested in the history of the United States.

being used for this purpose. Most of them had a table of some description and makeshift shelves and cupboards. In the 9 families in which some person was interviewed there was a total of 35 children, ranging from 5 months to 22 years of age. Families of six and eight were occupying one tent. One group of two related families, a total of 18 persons, had been fortunate enough to get 3 tents. Another family of 7 with a son 21 years of age and a daughter 19, as well as 3 younger children, had 2 tents....The workers had been warned against using the water from the well; they were hauling water from a well two miles distant and stored it in barrels. There was one open pit outside toilet which the entire camp used. This was in a fair state of cleanliness."

Equally depressing descriptions of housing conditions have come from as widely distributed territories as Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and New Jersey.

It was the pressure of these conditions with their accompanying threats to the well-being both of the inhabitants of the camps and of the communities in which the camps were located, together with the threat of community reactions against the farm workers who lived in the camps that caused the Farm Security Administration to resolve to push ahead with its program. The threat of social friction arising from unrest on the part of the workers and their families, and the reactions of the community to such unrest, were also impressive factors that caused the Administration to push its camp program.

Many groups were critical of the Administration's proposals. Some labor groups feared the development of oppressive concentration camps for the most underprivileged of worker groups. Social workers objected to the inadequacy of the housing facilities that were being offered. Conservatives objected to the expenditures. Reactionaries feared the protection of civil liberties which a Federal agency might offer to workers who had theretofore been denied the rights of settlement, of citizenship, and of self-organization. Agricultural economists and sociologists protested the alleged assumption that a blue print

for a planned agricultural economy was being imposed on farming communities.

The Administration was cognizant of all of these objections, and was aware of the validity of some of the criticisms. It was also aware, however, of conditions of life among the poorest of the low-income agricultural groups which were intolerable to any kind of a self-conscious society. Haltingly and gropingly it proceeded with the program. With each new project, new problems were tackled; new arrangements were effected to overcome failures resulting from previous efforts.

Gradually the program has received community acceptance. New communities have heard favorable reports of camps elsewhere and have asked for local assistance. Economists, sociologists and labor groups have seen the program meet problems for which there were no other solutions. And finally, John Steinbeck has produced his masterpiece, "The Grapes of Wrath", which has made the nation aware both of the problem, and of the successful, if not entirely satisfactory way, in which the Administration's program has at least ameliorated the living conditions of thousands of terribly underprivileged farm labor families.

At the present time, the Farm Security Administration has built or is building 10 farm labor family camps in California, 3 in Arizona, 4 in the Northwest, 4 in Texas, and 2 in Florida. It is expected that about 10 or 15 more camps will be built during the next fiscal year, and that more than half of these will be located in new territories.

The problem of housing these family groups has been three-fold: (1) to provide a minimum of comfort, privacy, decency and sanitation in the shelters and facilities; (2) to re-establish, through medical aid and the development of community life and social contacts the physical and social health of the

migrant families; and (3) to adjust the housing and community arrangements to the economic habits and requirements of migrant families who earn meagre incomes from erratic seasonal employments spread over wide geographical territories.

The first problem has been the simplest to solve. The results are not all that can be desired, but they represent the most that can be expected until the public mores will allow more for such low income and migratory family groups.

The typical camp is laid out in the shape of a hexagon, with rows of one-room steel shelters or of tent platforms on either side of a single roadway which outlines the shape of the camp. If the camp is a large one, accommodating about 400 families, there will be two border line roadways, with rows of shelters or tent platforms on either side. Every shelter or tent platform opens on a roadway. Water is piped to convenient locations, and garbage receptacles are available for every 6 to 10 shelters. The roadways are paved with an asphalt mix and adequate street lighting is available.

In the center of the hexagon is located a utility building, provided with flush toilets, hot and cold water, shower baths, and laundry and ironing rooms. On each side of the hexagon is also located a comfort station, making sanitary toilet facilities within easy access of every family.

At the front of the hexagon is a community center, providing space for meetings of the residents, indoor recreational facilities, a kindergarten, and facilities for adult educational work in the evenings. At one side are located an isolation unit for contagious diseases, a first aid room, a child clinic and nursery, and offices and living quarters for the camp manager and the camp nurse. On the other side is located a garage and a work shop, in

which campers make repairs to their cars and furnishings, and, under guidance of mechanics in the camp or of helpers from Works Progress Administration or National Youth Administration projects, make elementary pieces of furniture, and provide themselves with other household equipment.

Attached to some of the camps are small farm plots on which are produced subsistence crops to expand the dietary supplies of the campers. These plots are usually operated as farms under the direction of the camp managers and the produce is sold on a cooperative cost basis to the residents of the camps.

The campers elect a camp central committee, which serves as the governing body of the camp. It represents the entire camp population in its relationship with camp managers, and is the link between the two. The committee establishes such local rules as are necessary to harmonious life in the camp. All problems of discipline and all controversial questions are taken care of by this committee. The camps are, of course, subject to all local laws, and are subject to police and health inspection by accredited officers. The committee exercises no jurisdiction outside the camp limits, and all decisions and recommendations are referred to the camp manager for final determination. Camp management officials are appointees of the Government and are responsible for the operation of the camp.

The camp committee usually requires payment by the campers of ten cents a day into a camp fund. This fund, similar to the canteen fund in the army camps, is used to purchase recreational and other supplies for the use of the camp residents. Residents always supply their own furniture and cooking utensils, but from the camp fund they may secure the use of cook stoves, and other minor items of furnishings, and of tents, if they have no adequate shelter of their own and if one of the one-room cabins is not available. In

some cases families are allowed to perform work in lieu of the daily assessment. Every camper is required to contribute, in addition, two hours' work each week, under supervision of the camp manager, in policing the camp grounds.

An innovation in the camps is being developed this year. Portable units have been organized on trucks and trailers; these will permit the establishment of an orderly camp in a short season area for a period of 3 to 6 weeks, after which it can be dismantled and moved to another short season area to serve the harvesting of another crop. These units are equipped with portable power, water, and bathing units, built into trailers, tent offices and clinics, and portable tent platforms. These camps are established on leased sites and are accompanied by management personnel from one location to another.

The inadequacy of such housing for family groups is apparent. There can be no segregation in the sleeping quarters of sexes or of age groups. When families of from 4 to 6 members have to live in a one-room shelter or tent, they are obviously over crowded. The one room has to serve as a dormitory, kitchen, dining room and living room. Facilities for cleanliness, nevertheless, are adequately provided.

While the problem of housing has been the most costly, and is the most fundamental phase of the program, it is only the first step. Through a health program, sustained by grants to cooperative medical associations, and aided by state and local health authorities and medical associations, an effort is made to overcome both contagious and nutritional diseases among the migrant families. Pre and post-natal medical aid is made available to mothers, and assistance is given in the correction of physical defects which handicap the economic usefulness of members of the workers' families. As a result of this

activity, it is believed that the physical efficiency of the campers has been greatly increased, and that they have been made susceptible to the social rehabilitation that comes from the community activities of the camps.

The organizational structure of the camp government, together with the recreational and educational activities carried on, re-establishes the feeling of "belonging" in the workers and their family members. Once again they have status in a community. Friendships are formed, families begin to visit each other, as they formerly did when they were independent farmers in established farming communities. Once again they are free to participate in such usual community activities as public worship, and open discussion, to join in community support of baseball teams, and to go to dances and picnics on a basis of equality with all others who are there.

Through physical and social rehabilitation of the campers, by means of this type of community organization, the families find themselves prepared for the next step, economic rehabilitation, as soon as the opportunity can be found.

While it is admitted that the erection of camps for migratory farm workers is a concession to an undesirable economic phenomenon, represented by the recurrent seasonal demands of a commercialized agriculture for very large bodies of workers for short periods of time, who shortly must move on to other areas in order to secure any reasonable amount of employment during a course of a year, this does not mean that the Administration has agreed inevitably to the continuance of such an economic situation. Economic forces are already at work, suggesting to growers the desirability of seeking greater stability in their labor needs. Migrant families are beginning to discover increasingly continuous opportunities for employment in various farming areas.

As any family group finds such possibilities for more or less year round employment, they are encouraged to move into more adequate housing facilities which are attached to some of the camp properties. These houses consist of small two or three room cottages, built for greater permanency, privacy, and adequacy for family living. Equipped with lighting, heating, plumbing, and toilet facilities, these homes are rented for \$8 or \$9 a month. As the families eventually become more firmly established in the economy of the locality, they are encouraged to seek more adequate private housing facilities. As opportunities develop, some of them are assisted by the Farm Security Administration in the location of farms on which they can re-establish themselves as independent farm operators.

Subject to all the limitations that inhere in an attempt to provide decent housing for transitory families, we believe that a major contribution is being made to the personal, social, and economic rehabilitation of masses of people who, within the last two decades, have lost a status which they had a right to believe they would inherit.

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